

Washington, DC - U.S. Reps. Mark Kirk (R-IL) and Rick Larsen (D-WA) launched the U.S.-China Working Group, a bipartisan congressional organization of 20 Republicans and Democrats working to build diplomatic relations with China and increase congressional engagement on U.S.-China issues. More than 100 lawmakers, business executives, academics and administration representatives attended the group's kick-off event held Thursday evening on Capitol Hill.

Chinese Ambassador to the U.S., Zhou Wenzhong, spoke at the reception where he was joined by officials from the U.S. State Department and the US Trade Representative's Office.

"It is vital for Congress to increase its working relationship with the Chinese. Much of this century's history will be written between Washington and Beijing," said Kirk and Larsen. "We are starting the U.S.-China Working Group to build diplomatic relations with China and increase congressional engagement on all U.S.-China issues."

The U.S.-China Working Group will host regular meetings to hear from key business, academic and political leaders about U.S.-China issues ranging from trade and economic policy to space exploration.

"We want to increase our contact on shared interests and find new opportunities for a successful and strategic relationship," Larsen said. "While there remain areas of contention and disagreement, it's better to work with rather than against each other."

Kirk and Larsen said the group will go beyond typical Congressional caucuses by establishing business, academic and political advisory boards to gain varied perspectives, and help build consensus in Congress. Working Group members will work closely with the White House, State Department, congressional leadership, the academic community and key business leaders. A key goal of the group is to have the United States establish a "primary diplomatic relationship" with China.

"China looms large across many issues that directly impact the United States," said Kirk. "In the coming months, our Working Group will develop close ties to America's academic, business and

political leaders to develop a comprehensive, strategic relationship with China for the 21st century."

In addition to Ambassador Zhou, Working Group members heard from Myron Brilliant, vice president for East Asia for the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and Rich Ellings, president of the National Bureau of Asian Research.

"The business community understands the need for good diplomatic relations between the U.S. and China," Brilliant said. "We look forward to working with the U.S.-China Working Group to educate members on the importance of the U.S.-China relationship."

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